Mr. Donaldson. Thank you very much, sir.
The President. Thanks.

NOTE: The interview began at 8:25 p.m. aboard the U.S.S. *George Washington* en route to Normandy, France. In his remarks, the President referred to Rick Kaplan, executive producer, "ABC World News Tonight." A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Tom Brokaw of NBC News
June 5, 1994

D-Day Commemoration

Mr. Brokaw. Mr. President, I know you did a lot of homework for this occasion, but could any amount of homework prepare you for the emotion of what you've been going through and what you will go through?

The President. No. You know, we were in Italy, and I knew that many, many of our service people who fought there in that very difficult campaign thought that their service had never been adequately recognized. But nothing prepared me for the impact of the thousands of graves at Nettuno and what the veterans felt. Nothing, nothing could have prepared me for the emotional impact of what I saw outside of Cambridge with that Wall of the Missing, the 5,000 people, including Glenn Miller and Joseph Kennedy who died in air crashes, were never recovered. You can read about it, you can talk to people about it, but until you're there and it hits you, you can't imagine.

Mr. Brokaw. For this generation, your generation, for that matter, what are the lessons to be learned now from that day, D-Day, and that time?

The President. First of all, I think it's important to remember that what D-Day proved more than anything else was, to use General Eisenhower's words, the fury of an aroused democracy is still the most important force in the world. The fact that we were a free people—and yes, maybe we were a little slow, you can argue in hindsight, to respond to Hitler's aggression, but the fact that we were a free people, full of young, gifted men and women, like these young men sitting behind you today, who figured out how to win this war and would not be denied is a great lesson for today. Our system of government is still the best, and we should never forget that, because it is disorganized to some extent or messy but at least it allows us to govern ourselves from the inside, from our genuine emotions.

The second lesson I think we have to learn is that if we do what the people who won that war want us to do, if we do what Roosevelt and Churchill and Eisenhower and the others wanted us to do in the post-cold-war era, that is, if we stay involved in the world knowing we can't solve every problem, knowing we can't end every conflict, but knowing that we have to contain these things so that they don't flare up, then we'll never have to have another D-Day. That is the ultimate lesson. They all fought and died so that we wouldn't have to do that again. And the only way we can be sure is to stay strong and stay involved. And in a very uncertain world, knowing that from time to time we may make mistakes but that the ultimate lesson is as long as we're involved and we're trying to stop and contain these conflicts, we won't have another D-Day.

Foreign Policy

Mr. Brokaw. Those leaders that you just cited always knew when to draw the line. There is a continuing perception that you're still not comfortable with national security decisions. Can you help correct that during this occasion?

The President. Well, I think for one thing, the answer is—the short answer to that is yes, but the longer answer is slightly more complex, and I'd like to have the chance to answer it.

What we're trying to do is to do in the post-cold-war era what the leaders after World War II had to do. Keep in mind, they didn't quite know where to join the line either. For years people criticized President Truman because Russia built a Communist empire and occupied all of Eastern Europe. It took some time to figure out, you know, what was NATO going to do, what was the Marshall plan all about, what was our position in Asia going to be. And

that's the period we're in now. We're working at the line-drawing.

We do have some clear lines. We have a continuing security commitment to Korea and Japan, for example, which is unbending and cannot be breached. We have a continuing effort with Russia to make the world less nuclear, which is immediate in its implications in our security. And we are working through a lot of other things. In Bosnia what we have done is to say we're not sure we can solve this, but we can limit its reach, and we must. And we've been somewhat successful there, I think more successful than most people acknowledge.

And I think what you will see is as we work through these things and the shape of the post-cold-war world becomes clear, the lines that America will draw will become clear. We are not withdrawing. That's the main thing. We are trying to stay engaged.

North Korea

Mr. Brokaw. Isn't it possible that the North Koreans are responding to your various overtures because they believe that you'll talk the talk but, in the modern jargon, not walk the walk, that you've been ambivalent about Bosnia and Haiti and even about trade with China?

The President. No. I don't think that's what's going on. I think that they may think that the world community won't impose sanctions on them, but I think the world community will impose sanctions if they don't——

Mr. Brokaw. But if the world community does not, will this President say, "We're going to do it on our own; we're going to lead the way"?

The President. We won't have to do it on our own. There will be lots of countries there willing to help us, the so-called coalition of willing. I prefer to have the United Nations take the appropriate action because we know that Russia and China on the Security Council agree with us on this issue. They don't want North Korea to become a nuclear power. And they know North Korea promised not to become a nuclear power. So I prefer to do it that way.

But we are going to proceed firmly on this. I hope and believe the U.N. will do it. If it doesn't, then we'll look at who else wants to do it and what else we can do. But we can't turn away from this. This is not about the United States; this is about North Korea. They promised that they wouldn't be a nuclear power. They promised to let us inspect. I will say this, since I've been President we've engaged them more, and we have been able to inspect now. What is at issue here is the inspections they did not allow back in 1989 and what they're going to do about it and whether that gives them the ability to make nuclear weapons. Now, since they still deal with countries that we know are rogue states and support terrorism, that's of great concern to us. That is a big issue for the American people and the long-term security of the world. So we've got to be firm here.

Will the United Nations support us? I believe they will. If they don't, what will we do? I think there are other options open to us. But we cannot just walk away from this.

Mr. Brokaw. If they continue to test, for example, the Silkworm missile, which is the shipkiller, and any kind of picket line you would put around North Korea would be exposed to that kind of thing, but you think ultimately that they'll respond only to the military option?

The President. I'm not sure of that. They have said that they would consider sanctions an act of war, but I don't really believe that. Keep in mind there are lots of countries in the world that have nuclear programs. When President Kennedy was President, he thought by this time two dozen countries would be nuclear powers. We don't have two dozen nuclear powers because the United States and our allies have worked very hard to reduce the number of nuclear powers. North Korea promised they wouldn't do it. We're just asking them to keep their word to be part of the world community, to reach out and grow.

You know, the ultimate sanction is going to be for them to decide what kind of country they want to be. Do they want to be isolated and alone and impoverished, or do they want to work out their relationship with South Korea, with the United States, ultimately now with Japan, with China, with Russia. Everybody is saying, "Come on and be part of this world. Don't withdraw and be part of a dark future." And I still believe there's a chance they'll come back. But we just have to steadily keep on the course we're on. It is dictated by their behavior, not by ours.

Vietnam War

Mr. Brokaw. Mr. President, you've been getting all the respect that is due—[*inaudible*]—Commander in Chief during these D-Day ceremonies. As you live in this kind of a military

environment, do you ever late at night regret your own decision to avoid military service when you were a young man?

The President. I don't regret the fact that I opposed the conflict in Vietnam and our policy there and I did what I could to—honorably—to bring it to an end. I still think I was right on that. I think on balance it did our role in the world more harm than good, although we were well motivated. We certainly didn't—the only lesson in Vietnam is that you can't fight someone else's fight for them. You can't do that. There is a limit to what we can do for someone else.

But there are plenty of times when I wish I'd had the experience, because I, after all, I'm a child of World War II. I grew up on the war movies, you know, on John Wayne and John Hodiak and Robert Mitchum and all those war movies. I grew up with the memories of a father I never knew, with a picture of his uniform on in World War II.

What I'm doing this week has brought me back to my roots in a very profound way. You and I are about the same age, and you know what I'm talking about. There's nothing that can compare with it. And I think all the people who grew up in my generation were hurt maybe worse than any other generation could have been by their ambivalence over Vietnam because we all loved the military so much.

Mr. Brokaw. Do you understand the quiet resentment of many of the veterans who are here: you did not serve and that you are now the Commander in Chief?

The President. Sure, but I've been stunned by the number of the World War II veterans, by the dozens the other day when I spent hours with them at Nettuno, who said that they had supported me, they had voted for me, and that they thought it was not good for America that these personal attacks continue. I told them that they should stay in a good humor about it and I would, too. I can't worry about that. There is nothing I can do about the past. All I can do is get up every day and be faithful to these young men and women in uniform today, faithful to the oath that I swore to uphold, and make these calls the best I can.

And if I spend all my time worrying about what somebody else thinks, I can't do that job. What I owe the people, whether they support me or resent me, I owe every one of them the same thing, to do the very best I can every day. And that's what I'm doing.

American Values

Mr. Brokaw. Finally, Mr. President, do you think that we'll ever be able to restore in our country the values and the sense of common cause that existed 50 years ago?

The President. Well, we will be able to if the American people in peacetime can understand that their existence is threatened by some things that are going on inside our country, by what has happened to our families, to our communities, by the fact that crime has reached epidemic proportions and violence among so many of our young people, and that that also threatens who we are as a people.

One of the things I tried to say to the American people in 1992 that I try still to say is that our national security is a product of being strong on the outside and also being strong on the inside. And if we can face up to things that—we're facing up to our economic problems. We're doing much better there. But we still have problems with our children, problems on our streets, other problems we have to face up to. If we can face up to them, then we will have the kind of sense of community that we had in World War II.

NOTE: The interview began at 8:37 p.m. aboard the U.S.S. *George Washington* en route to Normandy, France. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.